

village roads seemed livelier and noisier than usual among the Sarts, but the adults rather gloomy and melancholy with a shy and evasive look. We had reached the end of this day's journey, the settlement of the Abdal tribe in the vicinity of Khotan, a curious tribe of beggars that seems to play a part among the Mohammedans rather reminiscent of the position of the Jews among Christian nations. Driven out of their country in consequence of the death of the Imam Hussein and scattered in small colonies in various parts of the Moslem countries, they are pursued by the curse of the Imam Hussein and are forced to go in for begging as their occupation. Both rich and poor have to sling a beggar's bag over their shoulders for a certain time every year and wander about the country begging for alms. You meet them everywhere, carrying a beggar's staff, some in rags, others well dressed and wearing ornaments of some value, rings, necklets, brooches etc. The sight of Abdals as beggars is so common that many people make the mistake of calling beggars Abdals. They seldom admit that they belong to this tribe and seem to consider the name Abdal an insult. When questioned, they say they belong to the Tamaghil tribe, for instance, i.e., they give the name of the Abdal village from which they come. They do not appear to be liked by the Sarts, partly because of the religious difference that arose through Hussein's death (the Abdals are said to celebrate the day on which the Mohammedans mourn Hussein's death as a feast-day), and partly because their beggars are accused of various tricks for inducing the superstitious Sarts to give them what they want.

In one of the village streets we came upon a group of the more highly respected inhabitants of the settlement. A tall, stout Abdal with a long beard and a frank and genial countenance proved to be their Yuzbashi and undertook to accompany us to their mullah, whom I was anxious to see in the hope of securing some interesting old documents. On the way he called to the men he met that they should come to the mullah's and soon we had quite a crowd gathered there. The mullah, a man of 35 or 40, as dark as a gypsy, with an expressive and animated face, received us with the hospitality characteristic of the population of the whole of this country. Fresh wheaten bread, grapes slightly shrivelled by the cold, raisins, nuts and tea were forced on us at once. After much hesitation the mullah entrusted me with two large volumes, unfortunately copies.

We arranged that I should spend the night at the Yuzbashi's, so as to have an opportunity of photographing some Abdal types and visiting Kumat, where the jade stone is found for which Khotan is famous. Accompanied by the mullah and a large crowd we repaired to the Yuzbashi's after sending a yigit into the town to fetch a pack-horse with the most necessary things that I had sent straight back to the town from Samada. In addition to the younger mullah the senior mullah of the colony, a man of 60 with a wasted countenance, came to the Yuzbashi's »tomasha». Except when answering the questions I put through Badsuddin's nephew, he sat by the fire with closed eyes, shaking his head slowly, as though all that went on round him did not affect him at all. When I begged him after some desultory conversation to tell me the history of his people as he had heard it told, he was lost in thought for some time with closed eyes and then recounted roughly the following — almost without a break and with some heat, accompanying his tale with gestures.